

Happy Birthday by embarrassing_myself

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Summary:

A soulmark was a unique mark that showed up on your body and you shared that exact mark with only one other person. Your soulmate, the person that matches you in every way. Of course, as the universe would have it, things couldn't be so simple for Will Byers.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Hello everyone, I had an idea for a soulmate AU and here it is. Sorry if there are mistakes, it's a bit rushed. I hope everyone enjoys and thank you so much for reading and commenting.

Sixteen. That was the age when everyone's soulmark would appear. It would happen on your birthday. 5840 days to be exact and the soulmark would appear the exact minute you were born, not a moment before and not a moment after. A soulmark was a unique mark that showed up on your body and you shared that exact mark with only one other person. Your soulmate, the person that matches you in every way.

And on your sixteenth birthday, if your soulmate has gotten their mark, you'll feel what they feel. It's a bond, so even if the person your meant to be with is on the other side of the world, you'll feel them and you'll know they're out there waiting to be found or perhaps are already searching.

Mike Wheeler was seventeen. He'd had his mark for a year and when he woke up that day and realized he couldn't feel the bond, he knew they had to be younger than him. But that wasn't a surprise. Because he would willingly bet his life on the fact that El Hopper was his soulmate. He was positive it would be her, as far as he was concerned, it was already a fact that they would be together. So, unlike many teenagers who couldn't feel their bond, Mike didn't worry one bit because in 10 months El would get her mark too. But, it wouldn't be the first time the universe had proved Mike wrong.

Since Joyce and Hopper had compared their marks and gotten married, their house had become the most visited by the group of high schoolers. It made sense seeing as how they could find two party members under one roof. It wasn't even a question where the party would meet up for El's birthday.

It was a late night party but El had been born at ten thirty sharp and

nobody wanted to miss the moment she got her mark. The moment her and Mike became official soulmates. The group had started the night with helpings of sugary cake, afterwards gifts were opened, and then they broke out the board games.

Mike and her had been sitting right next to each other, holding hands under the kitchen table and grinning from ear to ear while they waited. Will sat next to them and tried to focus on the game and not on the sick feeling in his stomach. It shouldn't bother him, it really shouldn't.

Mike was his best friend, El was his sister. He wanted to be happy for them, he knew he should /want/ them to be soulmates. But why did it hurt so much to see them looking so happy? Deep down Will had his answer but he could pretend. He was great at it. He could pretend that he hadn't been head over heels for Mike since day one. He could make believe that it didn't ache each time he noticed them stealing kisses from each other when they thought no one was looking. If Will didn't acknowledge his feelings, then they weren't real.

"Thirty minutes everyone!" Dustin called out excitedly as he glanced at the clock. After the games the group had switched to watching a movie in the living room, Joyce and Jim not far.

"Hey, I'm really sorry guys but I think I better turn in for the night," Will mumbled. "I don't think I can stay up any longer," he said, giving the group an apologetic smile.

"What? Will are you sure, it's only ten," Max said softly, giving the youngest of the six a worried look. "You're going to miss El getting her mark."

"Yeah, I'm sorry, really I'm just falling asleep," he said, keeping the small smile plastered on his face. "But I'll see it first thing in the morning," he said, looking towards El who looked slightly disappointed.

"Alright, if you're sure," Mike said, wearing the same expression as Max had. "Sleep well okay?" He added gently.

"I will, happy birthday El," Will said, forcing his smile to widen as he

glanced towards her. "I love you," he added.

"I love you too, goodnight Will," El added, a smile of her own. "I'll see you in the morning," she said before pressing a quick kiss to his cheek.

"Goodnight everyone," Will said, getting off the sofa and giving the group a quick and final wave before heading off towards his room.

He wasn't tired but he wanted nothing more than to be alone at that moment. He just didn't have it in him to watch. He knew they'd be excited when they compared marks, they'd kiss and they'd hold each other close and the rest of the group would be happy for them. Will didn't feel like he belonged there. It was a happy moment and it should be shared with people who were happy for them.

When he closed the door he quickly leaned up against it, finally he was free to let the tears fall. He always knew the day would come and he'd realize he had absolutely no chance with Mike. Will had known there would be a time in his life when he'd have to watch Mike find the person he was meant to be with. The person that wasn't Will.

He did his best to control himself, even though he felt like he was falling apart on the inside. Slowly he changed into his night clothes, trying to shut out the pain while he turned out his lights and crawled into bed. It felt like the end of something and Will didn't want to face what came next. The Upside Down, Hawkins Lab, Demodogs and Shadow Monsters alike, nothing compared to the heartache Will felt.

He buried his face into his pillows and tried to sleep. While the tears slowed down, the empty feeling inside of him only grew as the minutes passed. Tomorrow would be a new day and he'd have to deal with it. One way or the other.

At some point Will must have fallen asleep because the next thing he knew he was being shaken awake by someone. "Huh?" He mumbled, jolting awake. He tried to adjust his eyesight to see into the darkness of his room. "What's going on?" Will asked, startled. After everything that happened, Will always felt slightly panicked when he first woke up, like he still expected to be in another dimension.

“Will, you gotta get up, El got her soulmark,” Dustin said, shaking Will once again even though it was plain to see that the other teen was awake.

“Dustin? I...I’m happy but I thought I told her I’d see it in the morning,” Will mumbled, finally feeling his heart rate start to slow. He’d been perfectly content with sleeping through the whole production, why did Dustin have to go and wake him up only to remind him why he’d went to bed in the first place.

“No dude, it’s not good. It’s actually the opposite of good, it’s bad,” Dustin said, his tone grave. “They don’t match. Her and Mike, it’s not a match.”

“What?” Will asked, sitting up and trying to get his brain to process what he’d just heard. Was he still dreaming? “What do you mean they don’t match?”

“Their soulmarks, Will. Keep up. Her mark and Mike’s mark don’t match. El is close to tears and Mike is having a meltdown and half of us are trying to comfort El and the other half are trying to calm Mike down, even your mom and Jim are talking to them. We really need you in there,” Dustin explained.

Will felt numb but forced himself to nod while he heaved himself out of bed. “Okay, okay I’m coming,” he said as he followed Dustin into the other room.

Like Dustin had said, the room was chaotic. Mike was pacing the floor while El sat on the sofa. Next to her were Hopper, Joyce, and Max. Each one talking at the same time, trying convince her that it would be okay.

Lucas had been following Mike around, trying to do the same. “I can’t believe this,” Mike mumbled, shaking his head. “I have to look again,” he said, rushing back to the sofa.

“Mike come on, they aren’t even the same color,” Dustin groaned. He was right though. On El’s left leg, right below her knee was a new

was a soulmark. It had no real shape it to, like most soulmarks, instead it was a series of zigzagged lines in red and gold hues. While Will thought it was pretty, it looked nothing like Mike's.

Mike's was more circular and instead of red and gold, his was a shade of green and blue. It was something Will had grown used to looking at, it was on the top part of Mike's right hand after all. He seen it everyday, sometimes it felt like he'd had the shape memorized. Swirled blue lines fading into green swirled lines.

"I thought...I don't understand," Mike mumbled, shaking his head again. "This...it's not how it's meant to be." Mike stared at El with a look of sadness. "It was meant to be us."

"Mike," Hopper sighed, getting off the sofa and placing a hand on the other's shoulder. "I know it's been a hard night but I think you better head home. You need some time to...to..." the man trailed off, unsure of what to say. "You just need some time and a good night's sleep, things will seem better in the morning. The same goes to everyone else. It's getting late and you can all see each other tomorrow."

"Yeah, come on Mike, I'll walk you home," Lucas said, steering the taller teen towards the front door, Dustin and Max following. "We'll see you tomorrow, guys," he added.

It was clear they were all in for a long night.

Finally around midnight, everyone settled down. El seemed to be in a better frame of mind and Joyce and Hopper had let themselves go to bed for the night. Will had been almost been expecting to hear his own bedroom door creek open. It was something they sometimes did when they were struggling. Some nights El would crawl in bed next to him for a few hours, some nights Will would get in her bed for the night. And some nights they would stay up all night in the living room.

"Are you okay?" Will asked softly as he made room for her. He knew she probably wasn't, Will doubted he'd be okay after a night like that.

"Can I tell you something?" She asked softly, carefully getting into

bed beside Will. "Without you thinking any less of me?"

"Jane, you know I'd never think less of you," Will said, using her birth name for emphasis. It was dark in his room but he could still make out her features. She looked worried and scared almost. "You can tell me anything."

"I'm not upset," she mumbled. "Not like Mike is."

Jane had come along way when it came to communication. While she still didn't say too much, still sometimes lacked the words she needed to convey herself, Will always understood her. Maybe because she always understood him too.

"I don't understand. You're not upset that you and Mike aren't a match?" Will asked. This was one of the very rare times that he couldn't figure out what the other meant.

"I-I am," she said quickly, shaking her head. "But he's more upset. I'm...disappointed," she added after a moment. "But not like Mike."

"Are you okay with not being his soulmate?" Will asked, trying to find her logic behind everything. "It's okay to not be sad, El. If it's not what you wanted, you don't have to pretend like it was."

"My soulmate is out there, even if it's not Mike. I still want to find them," El said before sighing gently. "I will always love Mike. But not like I love my soulmate. I want them no matter what."

Finally Will was starting to understand a little better. While Mike was devastated, El was just disappointed. She still wanted to find her match. "You'll find them, I know you will," Will said after a short moment. "And Mike will find his too."

El nodded in return, a real smile ghosting her face for a moment. "Will, I'm excited to find them. I can't wait to fall in love with them," she whispered.

For the first time all night, Will felt an actual sense of happiness for her. He wanted that too. He wanted El to find her soulmate, to fall in love, and to get everything her heart ever wished for. "I'm excited for you too, El," Will said, smiling back.

“Goodnight, I’ll see you in the morning,” She said grabbing Will’s hand and squeezing it for a few short seconds before crawling back out of his bed and slipping out of the room silently. Will was glad he knew what all of this meant for El, but it still didn’t solve everything. Especially not for Mike.

“Mike, don’t you think you’re being just a little over dramatic?” Dustin asked when Mike refused to eat his lunch that afternoon. “I know it sucks but it’s not the end of the world. So the person you liked didn’t match you, can’t be miserable about it.”

“You don’t understand,” Mike huffed, roughly pushing his tray of school food away from him across the table. “You have your soulmate,” he said, glancing towards Lucas. “El was meant to be my soulmate, I had my whole life planned out. It’s like suddenly everything I thought was true is a just...untrue,” he sighed, resting his head down on the table into his arms. “It’s fucked up.”

Lucas rolled his eyes when he was sure Mike could no longer see. “Dude come on, your soulmate is out there. Once you find them, you’ll forget all about this whole ordeal. It’s all going to be worth it in the end.”

“No. I wanted it to be her,” Mike said, raising his head again and lowering his tone. “I was certain that it was her,” he whispered. Will could see the sadness in his eyes and it hurt to know that he’d wanted El so much. But it hurt to see Mike hurt just as much. “I don’t even want a soulmate anymore. I don’t care who’s out there, I don’t care who gets my mark. The only reason I’d ever want to meet them is to tell them about how they fucked everything up!” Mike exclaimed before getting up and leaving.

“Where are you going?!” Dustin called out, throwing his hands up in frustration. “Mike you’re overreacting!” It was too late though, the older teen had already headed out of the cafeteria.

“Will, maybe you should go talk to him,” Lucas finally said. “You’re the only one he’ll listen to. Just try to calm him down for us? I don’t want to spend all of science dealing with a Mike Wheeler melt down.”

“I can try,” Will said softly. Truthfully he felt like he was having his own meltdown. Mike had said he didn’t want a soulmate. That El had been the only one of him. How as he meant to feel? Since middle school Will had been absolutely in love with him. It stung to hear Mike say those things. But it wasn’t Mike’s fault, it was Will’s secret, one that he’d never tell. “Yeah, I’ll do my best,” he added before getting up and exhaling softly. “Don’t expect too much though.”

It wasn’t hard to find the taller teen, he hadn’t gone far after all. Will had spotted Mike not far from the cafeteria doors. Everyone was either still in lunch or in class so it left the halls empty. Mike had been leaning up against the wall, his hands shoved in his pockets and sullen look on his face.

“Is there anything I can do?” Will asked, leaning up against the same wall next to the other. “I don’t think I know what to say but If you told me what would help I’d do it.”

“It’s okay, Will. It’s just hard right now,” Mike admitted with a sigh before glancing over at the shorter boy. “I know she doesn’t feel the same way. I could see it last night. For a second all I could see was this new excitement on her face when she got her mark. Even after she realized it didn’t look mine.”

“Mike...” Will trailed off, wishing he actually did have the right words to say. “You’ll always have El in your life, just not in the way you thought you would.”

“That’s the biggest problem,” Mike groaned, running a hand down his face. “It’s like I have no idea what to do next. I didn’t need to look for my soulmate because I thought I had already found them. And now I know I haven’t found anyone at all. I planned it all out, every part of my life with her. Now I don’t even know what I’m doing.”

“Mike you’ll find them. Lucas is right, you know. You’re going to find them and none of this is going to matter to you. Cause all you’ll be

able to think about is them,” Will whispered.

“It’s a nice thought but...doubt that’s going to happen,” Mike muttered bitterly. “Like I said, I honestly don’t want a soulmate anymore. I loved El, I still do. Nobody could understand what it feels like to care so much for someone who doesn’t have your mark. Nobody gets what it’s like to not be destined to end up with the person you want the most.”

Will wanted to laugh. He knew exactly how Mike was feeling. He knew how much it hurt to realize the person you love isn’t the person for you. He held his tongue and nodded. “No, I guess I don’t understand how your feeling but I know you hurt and I’m sorry.”

Finally Mike gave him a soft smile, his eyes lightening up some. “Hey, at least I’ll always have you. Thanks for coming to cheer me up, It’s just going to take some time to get over. You know you didn’t have to skip lunch for me though, let me buy you something after class?” Mike asked.

It was Will’s turn to smile and nod. “Of course, I never turn down free food. Especially if it’s French fries and a milkshake,” he hinted playfully while Mike laughed happily at him.

“Okay, hint taken, it’s yours,” he grinned before throwing an arm around Will’s shoulder. “Come on, the bell is about to ring.”

A few months later, when Max turned sixteen, El found her soulmate.

While Will would have liked to say Mike’s attitude towards soulmates and soulmarks had improved, it only seemed to be getting worse.

El and Max were undeniably happy. Suddenly they became each others worlds. Not that the two girls hadn’t gotten close over the last few years, this was something new. Now instead of her and Mike holding hands, it was her and Max. It was suddenly the two of them stealing kisses from each other during movie nights and playing with each other's hair during quiet moments.

Will couldn’t help but think that somehow Max knew. Or she at least

had a suspicion because El was the first person she compared her mark to. One and done. It was that simple. And amazingly...correct.

But he also had to admit that the group dynamics had changed drastically over the last couple of months. While El didn't attend public high school with them, instead taking online courses at home, they were all still together after class ended. Dustin and Lucas had gotten their marks last year so they were content with things. The party had grown used to them being a couple.

El and Max were new though. Their happiness seemed to radiate off each other, they were always smiling and whispering to each other. It was the honeymoon phase and Will knew it would eventually pass. They two would start to find a comfortable medium. But he also didn't want anyone to spoil their new bond. Mike however seemed to sulk more and more when they were all together. He was in his own perpetual state of grumpiness. Will could do nothing but feel awkward between the two happy couples and the unhappy single teen.

"Do you ever get sick of seeing everyone so happy?" Mike asked one evening while the group had gathered at his house to watch a few movies in the basement. Mike had taken the opportunity to make some popcorn and Will offered to help.

"Um?" Will started, unsure of how to answer that question. "Sometimes it would be nice to have a soulmate, but I love my friends. I want them to be happy," he said, giving Mike a nervous look. Worried that that wasn't what he wanted to hear. But Will wouldn't lie either. He was happy that they were happy, even if he wasn't always.

"Yeah, of course...I mean I'm happy that their happy," he sighed before setting down the popcorn bowl. "It's just-it still kind of hurts to see El with anyone else, even if it is Max and it just reminds me of how I don't have my soulmate. Even if I did I wouldn't want them though," Mike mumbled, shaking his head. "I'm a mess of emotions, you probably don't know what to think huh, Will?" Mike asked, smiling sadly.

"It's okay, Mike. It's hard," Will said, giving the other a sad look of

his own. "You aren't alone though, you've still got me. I don't have my soulmate either. And even if our fiends have theirs, you still have them. We're always going to be best friends."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I get tired of feeling like the only anti soulmark person around. Do you...do you feel like that too?" Mike asked, asking Will a question of his own.

"What do you mean?" Will asked in confusion. He knew Mike was no longer a support of soulmates or soulmarks but he'd never given it much thought himself. Mainly because he'd always been too busy thinking about Mike.

"You know, like we don't need our soulmates. That we can get along just fine without them. Fuck the whole soulmark shit," Mike said, narrowing his eyes and shaking his head. "Good for them for being happy and with each other, but I'm fine on my own. I don't need some 'other half' to complete me. I'm already whole." Mike said, his face serious and deadest. "I just wondered if maybe you feel like that too."

"I don't have my soulmark so...I don't really know how to feel yet." Will shrugged, not sure he liked where the conversation was headed.

"You'll get yours too, it's already January. It's only a few months away," Mike said, his tone finally tapering off into something softer but unrecognizable. "Do you plan on spending the rest of your life searching for them? Don't waste your whole life looking for someone when you could be happy, just as happy, with somebody right in front of you. You understand where I'm coming from? You might feel what they feel and you might share a silly mark with them, but that doesn't mean they're right for you."

"I think so," Will said heavily. "I don't really plan on trying to find them or anything like that. If they showed up that's good I guess, if not...well it wouldn't matter. They just wouldn't be there," Will said.

Mike was the person Will loved. He had no idea how he'd feel trying to be with anyone else. It wasn't something he could imagine for himself. Even with a soulmark, Will imagined he'd spend the rest of his life pinning after Mike. It was the opposite for him, the opposite

of what Mike had said anyway. He'd waste his life on someone who was right of him, the person he could never have, instead of trying to find that one person who matched completely. It was ironic.

"You guys, is that popcorn done yet?!" Max said walking into the kitchen with El right behind her. "What are you talking about?" She asked when's he noticed how serious the two boys looked.

"Nothing, don't worry about. Yeah it's done, come on, we're missing the movie," Mike said, giving Will appointed look before grabbing the popcorn and heading down the stairs once again. The two girls exchanged confused looks but didn't say anything more about it. Instead they grabbed themselves some sodas out of the fridge.

"Are you coming Will?" El asked, waiting for Will to follow her and Max back downstairs.

"Yeah, I'm coming," Will nodded, forcing himself out of his thoughts for a bit. He didn't want to think about everything Mike had said. And for a while he wouldn't need to. He still had nearly two months before his own birthday, He could worry about it then.

And of course when Will's birthday did finally come, things would change again. And not for the better.

2. Chapter 2

“So do we know what we’re doing for Will’s birthday yet?” Lucas asked when the party squeezed into Mike’s truck. Really it was only meant to seat three people but Will had always been small enough to fit too. It was a tight fit but they had made it work all throughout high school.

“I’m not sure, maybe just the arcade or something. I’ll probably have a small family dinner and then we can go out. I didn’t really wanna do a big birthday thing,” Will admitted as Mike pulled out of the school parking lot.

“Are you sure, it is your sixteenth you know,” Mike said, glancing over at Will.

“Yeah man, you’re getting your soulmark! It’s a huge deal!” Dustin said, trying to nudge Lucas over some. “Like, it’s the biggest birthday of your life, you should do something beside the arcade.”

“He doesn’t have to make it about his soulmark,” Mike pointed out, a frown on his face while he drove them to Will’s house. “In fact it shouldn’t be about that at all. It doesn’t define him.”

“Oh my God, you had to get him started again,” Lucas groaned, throwing his head back. “You couldn’t just keep your mouth shut.”

Dustin shot them both a look of irritation. “It can be about his soulmark if he wants it to be,” Dustin huffed, crossing his arms.

“Will doesn’t care about that bullshit mark. Believe it or not, Dustin, some people have lives outside of soulmates. Some people’s existence doesn’t revolve around a stupid mark,” Mike shot out.

“Do you have to be so down on everything?” Dustin asked, glaring at Mike. “Maybe Will wants to have a soulmate and a meaningful relationship with them, ever think about that? Just because you’re so unhappy all that time doesn’t mean Will has to be.”

“Guys, enough,” Lucas said, trying to end the argument before it got

too heated. "It's Will's birthday, he can do whatever he wants."

Will had slumped down in the space next to Lucas and Mike and was staring miserably at the dash. He hated being caught in between fights.

"Sorry," Mike said when he caught a glimpse of Will's expression. "Lucas is right, it's your birthday Will. Anything you wanna do, we're gonna do it, okay?"

Will forced a smile before nodding. "Yeah, okay. I still think the arcade sounds good though."

"It's settled then, tomorrow is an arcade day!" Lucas said, grinning happily. "Six sound good? We can stop by your house and pick you up. We'll take my car so we can all ride."

"Yeah sounds good. I just have to have dinner first and then I'm sure my mom will let me go do whatever," Will said, sighing softly, relieved that the argument was over.

"What time do you get your soulmark?" Mike asked after a few moments of silence. "Do we get to be around for it?"

"It's pretty late, almost midnight. I don't think my mom is going to let me stay out that late, not on a school night," Will said with an apologetic look. "It won't be a big deal though, I don't really care about the mark."

That seemed to make Mike perk up some and he nodded in agreement. Even if Dustin deflated on the far left of them. "Okay well, we'll see it the next day anyway."

"Happy Birthday!" Joyce sang happily as she brought out the cake. Will smiled from his seat at the table, El and Hopper seated right next to him. "Are we ready to sing?" She asked the small group while Will only rolled his eyes playfully. "Can't blow out the candles unit we sing."

So Will suffered through the slight embarrassment of having his stepdad, mom, and stepsister, sing to him. For a few moments he was left staring at the flickering flames of his birthday candles. Will had never told anyone but he had stopped wishing on candles on a long time ago. His wishes never seemed to come true anyway. This year would be no different. He sighed inwardly before quickly blowing out the flames and forcing another smile.

“Let me get the plates and we’ll have cake,” Joyce said after she’d managed to get a photo of Will at the table. “Then presents!”

There were a couple years of Will’s life when he knew his mom really couldn’t afford much for his birthday. Another secret he’d kept from his mom was how he’d heard her on the phone with his grandmother when he was about to turn twelve. He’d heard his mom cry because she wouldn’t be able to afford gifts. Will knew enough, young or not, to realize that all his gifts came from his grandparents that year.

Things had been better financially though. Will still couldn’t ever bring himself to ask for much. The pile of gifts stacked up on the table seemed too much and it almost felt overwhelming. “You guys didn’t have get me anything,” he said, looking between Hopper and his mom.

“Of course we did, kid. It’s your birthday,” Hopper said with a smile, ruffling Will’s hair some. “It’s your sixteenth birthday, you only get one,” he pointed out, reminding Will of what Dustin had said. As the night went on, Will felt more and more like he wished he could have just skipped over his birthday all together.

It didn’t take long for him to wrap things up with his family. Everyone had a slice of cake and watched as Will opened his gifts shyly, continuing to tell them that it was ‘too much’ or ‘you really didn’t have to,’ All new art supplies from both of them, clothes from his mom, money from hopper, headphones and a new phone case from El. Of course he’d loved everything he’d gotten though.

Not long after his friends showed up, each with something of their own. “I hope we ain’t crashing the party, Mrs Byers, I mean Mrs Hopper,” Dustin said, quickly catching himself when he spotted Jim.

Joyce only laughed brightly. "It's alright, Dustin. And no, we were just finishing up. If you kids get in soon enough you can still have some cake, there's plenty left!"

"Chocolate?" Dustin asked, giving her a hopeful look.

"Of course," Joyce smirked. "Will, don't go before you open your friend's gifts!"

"Mom, it's almost six," Will said, glancing towards the front door. Like maybe he could will himself out of it with his thoughts.

"It's alright, it'll only take a minute," Lucas said, throwing an arm around him. "Come on, real quick,"

Once again Will sat down for gifts. Part of him hated getting things, mainly because it was always too nice, too thoughtful, he could never find the right words to thank his friends for what they got him. For all that they do for him.

From Max he'd received a basketful full of his favorite treats and candies. From Lucas he'd gotten more art supplies and from Dustin he'd received a gift card. Will smiled and thanked them.

"I told you it was kind of impersonal to get him a gift card," Lucas said, nudging Dustin.

"No! I love it, really! I like picking things out, this was great, thank you Dustin," Will said quickly, not wanting his friend to feel like gotten a bad gift.

Slowly the room glanced towards Mike, waiting to see what he'd gotten the other. "Actually, Will, I'm sorry I left you gift in my room. I'll have to get it to you tomorrow," the taller teen said apologetically, rubbing the back of his neck.

"In your room? I thought-" Dustin started but was quickly cut off by another nudge. "Ow," he grumbled, narrowing his eyes some at Lucas. "Stop doing that."

"It's alright, Mike. You really didn't have to get me anything anyway. I don't mind waiting," Will said gently, to him it really didn't matter.

He was just happy to have his friends with him. "Can we go now?" He asked, looking over at his mom and Jim.

"Yeah, yeah everybody get out, go have fun," Jim said, patting Will on the shoulder as he darted passed him. "Be back at ten, it's still a school night."

"Will, you riding with me? Dustin's mom let him borrow the car so that we wouldn't have to worry about fitting in the truck. I figured the girls could ride with him and Lucas," Mike said, already heading towards the beat up truck.

"That sounds good, Dustin picks awful music anyway, at least I know you'll let me decide," Will said, grinning as he claimed in next to the other.

He could sense something was different though. Or...something was off. Mike seemed more reserved than he usually was. He looked like he was thinking heavily about something.

The ride over to the arcade was short and quite for the most part, neither boy saying much and instead focusing on the radio. Mike parked around the back of the building and killed the engine. Before Will could reach for the door handle though, Mike stopped him. "Hey um, Will?" Mike asked softly.

"Yeah, what's up? Everything okay ?" Will asked, looking worriedly at the other.

"Yeah, yeah of course I just...I uh-well I didn't actually forget your gift. I just wanted to give it to you in private. It's um-it's kind of stupid but I didn't know what to get you," Mike said, stuttering and rambling as he tried to explain to Will.

"Mike, anything you get me could never be stupid. You could give me a rock and I'd still like it," Will laughed, giving Mike a reassuring look.

"Right, well I really hope you like it," Mike said, laughing nervously. Without waiting any longer he pulled out a small box from his pocket. "You don't have to like it though, I know it's kinda stupid

and...well maybe you should just open it," he mumbled, handing the box over.

Will carefully pulled the lid off and gasped softly. Inside was a necklace with a delicate silver chain. Attached to the chain was a small star outlined in the same colored silver but the inner color was a dark sparkling blue. "Mike, it's beautiful," Will said, trying to understand why he'd get such a gift.

"It's actually part of a set. I've got the moon," he said softly, reaching into the collar of his shirt and pulling out his own necklace. "I know we're probably too old for friendship necklaces and I know it's kind of...I don't know girly? But I wanted to get you something special and I had no idea what to get I just-" Mike trailed off before Will quickly stopped him.

"Mike, no I love it. Seriously, this is the best thing I've ever gotten. It's perfect," Will whispered back, glad that it was getting dark out. He hoped that the other couldn't see how red his face had become or how his eyes looked a little misty.

"Will...promise me you won't buy into all this soulmark stuff. I know you're going to get yours tonight but everywhere I look I see people trying to find their match or thinking that just because somebody has a bond and a mark it makes them the right person for them," Mike sighed. "It makes me angry cause it's so bullshit and I remember how disappointed and hurt I was when I didn't match with El, I don't want that for you. Promise you won't change when you get it?"

Will could feel his chest tighten up and his eyes threaten to spill over with tears, not exactly the happy ones anymore. Soulmates. He couldn't put into words how badly he wanted Mike to be his but listening to the older teen talk about how he couldn't stand the idea of a soulmate was hard. Even if he knew he'd never get Mike for a match.

"Mike, I promise. The mark doesn't mean anything to me, I'll probably never find my soulmate anyway," he mumbled, shaking his head. He didn't need to add the part about how even if he did, he didn't think he could love them as much as he already loved Mike. I don't care about soulmates.

Mike looked relieved again before nodding. "Good, I just...I didn't want you to get all caught up in it too. It doesn't matter. Fuck soulmates," he said, smiling playfully. "I'm more than happy without one and you'll see that you'll be just as happy without one too."

Will didn't say anything, instead he forced a smile and nodded in agreement.

"Now that that's over, I dare you to try and beat Max at her high score. I'll race you to the door," He called out, already throwing the truck door open and dashing out. Will hurried to catch up to him.

**

The night had gone pretty much as expected. It was fun of course but comfortably ordinary. He hadn't gotten to beat max's high score but he'd played plenty of other games. They'd ate popcorn and stuffed pretzels and made the most of the night. Will would have been lying if he said he wasn't exhausted when he finally got home around ten.

After a quick goodnight to his friends, once again thanking them for his gifts, he and El made it inside. They gave Jim and Joyce the run down of how the night went before taking off to get ready for bed themselves. Before Will crawled into bed, he carefully put the necklace Mike had given him on. Maybe they could still be something. There was a chance wasn't there? Even if they weren't soulmates maybe somehow Mike and him could be more.

Will didn't waste too much time on that thought though. He couldn't get his hopes up only to be disappointed and crushed. They were friends, best friends. He'd have to be happy with that. And when he woke up in the morning, he'd have a new mark on his body to ignore.

And just like that, Will let himself fall asleep.

That morning was just like any other morning, his alarm woke him up and he took a moment to stretch out in bed. That was until suddenly he was hit with a feeling. A feeling that he knew somehow wasn't his own. It was like a mirror, someone's emotions were

reflecting back to him. Shock. And with that Will quickly shared that feeling.

Instantly he was awake and searching his body for the mark. First he looked over his legs. They were the same as they had been last night. Then he looked at his arms, still nothing. So he pulled off his pajama bottoms and checked his thighs. Still nothing. Next he stripped out of his shirt and glanced at his stomach but there was no mark. Then his eyes caught a glimpse of his chest. There. There was the mark.

And when Will looked properly at it, he couldn't understand how his heart didn't stop. "Oh no, oh no," he mumbled, staring down at his chest, right over where his heart should be. Blue and green swirled delicately in a circular pattern. "Mike," he whispered, his voice hoarse.

He'd spent the last year looking at Mike's right hand to know that it was a match. Him and Mike were a match. Will should have been happy, he should have been elated.

But all he could think about were all the words Mike had said to him over the last couple of months. He didn't want a soulmate, he hated the idea of a soulmate, his soulmate had ruined everything. "Oh no," Will whispered again, feeling his eyes start to water. Through the bond he could feel someone, no Mike's, emotions spilling back onto him. Confusion.

"I have to hide this," Will whispered, trying to rip his eyes away from the the mark but finding that he was unable to. Mike's mark on him. He still couldn't believe it. He couldn't let anyone see, Mike could never find out or he'd hate Will. He'd hate him for being his soulmate and ruining his life and any chance he had with El. Will quickly threw a shirt over his head and tried not to hyperventilate.

He needed a new mark. He could hear El's alarm going off in the next room over. Jim and his mom were probably already up. They would all want to see and Will couldn't let that happen. Without thinking he rushed over to his new art supplies and pulled out an expensive felt tipped marker.

Purple and yellow, those were the colors Will quickly decorated his

arm with. He knew it hardly looked real but maybe he could get by with it. He didn't have a choice. He settled on a sloppy zigzagged pattern before rushing to put the pens away. Nobody could know, nobody ever needed to know. This was just one more secret Will could keep to himself.

He quickly threw the rest of his clothes on before adding a quick pull over. He was just in time, a few minutes later El and Joyce both barged into his room. "Will, did you get it?" El asked excited. "Can we see?"

"Uh yeah, yeah I got it. Uh...yeah," he mumbled, slowly pushing his sleeve up his arm. This would be the real test. El's face fell some when she spotted and for a minute Will thought that maybe it looked as fake as it was. But Joyce beamed at her younger son.

"It's beautiful Will! I'm so excited for you! Jim is making pancakes to celebrate, come on down when your ready!" His mom said, pressing a quick kiss to his cheek before making her way back out the open door.

"Do you feel them?" El asked, looking gently at Will. Will only nodded before pulling the sleeve back down. "Yeah, I do but...I'm not thinking too much about it. I'm just really excited for pancakes. Let's go eat?"

"Yeah, come on let's go," El said, her expression changing into something lighter and happier. "I think he made me waffles."

**

At school Mike was the first person to see Will. The moment he spotted the other he was running over, so fast that it left him breathless when he skidded to a stop in front of the shorter teen. "Will! Did you get it, can I see?" Mike asked, huffing as he looked over Will, trying to see any visible skin.

Will had never seen Mike ask to see a soulmark so fast before. Will just nodded carefully before once again pulling his sleeve up and showing Mike the fake soulmark he'd drawn on his skin that

morning. The real one safely hidden under his shirt.

“Oh...I...” Mike trailed off, his expression falling again, much like El’s had. “That’s strange I thought for a minute-” Mike trailed off, shaking his head.

“What?” Will asked slowly, even though he knew the answer. He could feel a sadness washing over him while he tried to keep his own emotions calm. He could feel something sad inside of Mike as the bond mirrored the feeling back at him.

“It’s weird. My soulmate has the same birthday as you do,” Mike mumbled. Suddenly he scoffed though and shook his head once again. “I woke up this morning, I could feel them. Already they’re a problem for me,” Mike frowned before adjusting his book bag on his shoulder. “Anyway, I have to stop at my locker before class, I’ll see you soon,” Mike said, leaving and unknowingly projecting his anger to Will.

Will could feel his heat break all over again. He did his best to hide it though as he headed to his own locker.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm sorry for the slow updates, school keeps me busy. Also I feel like this chapter is a lot of filler, but the pace quickens after this! (Quick warning: somewhat graphic discription of self harm but not in the ordinary context)

Even though Will knew better, he'd hoped that things would get easier. As the weeks passed, things only seemed to get worse. Mike continued to radiate anger towards their shared link while Will struggled to hide the hide sadness he knew Mike felt.

Not only that but trying to hide his actual soulmark had proved to be harder than Will had expected. Everyday he'd had to take the same two markers and carefully trace over the old lines of his fake mark. It felt like every time he turned around somebody would be there to out his secret.

"Are we still on for this weekend?" Dustin asked the small group of friends as they walked home after class. The weather had been nice lately, too nice to ride five minutes in a car when it was just as easy to bike or walk.

"Sleepover at your house?" Lucas asked, slinging his bag over his shoulder. "Yeah, I'm still in. Mike, Will?" Lucas asked, turning to look at the two.

"I'll be there, want me to bring snacks?" Will asked, forcing a smile as he offered. He did his best to keep up appearances but he was finding it harder and harder to function. Even being around Mike hurt. Being away from him hurt just as much though. There was no winning.

"It's alright, I've got food covered. I think my mom is going to order some pizza or something. What about you Mike?" Dustin asked, looking over at the taller of the four. "Mike?" He called again when Mike continued to stare blankly up ahead.

"Mike! Are you listening?" Dustin asked louder, this time forcing Mike out of his slight daze. "Where did you go there?"

"Sorry," Mike sighed, rubbing a hand down his face. "My soulmate is getting on my nerves again," he grumbled before rolling his eyes. "They're always sad and it's getting old. I wish they'd get over it," Mike huffed while Will kept his face neutral. It stung of course, just like every remark Mike made about it.

"Maybe you should find them...and ask them why're they're sad," Dustin suggested slowly like it was the most obvious thing in the word. "Maybe you could help them."

"I'd rather not," Mike added coldly, folding his arms across his chest. "They ought to grow up and solve their own problems instead of waiting for somebody else to come along and do it for them."

"Dude, if you're sending out angry vibes all the time of course they're going to be sad. Try focusing on something nice, you know? Try to send them good emotions," Lucas suggested with a shrug. "You can't blame them. They know you're mad so...what did you think was going to happen?"

Will stayed silent as they walked, they were getting closer to his house and he was more than relieved. It made him feel slightly better to know Lucas at least understood. Still, didn't want any part of the conversation, not when it would be too easy to give himself away with the slightest mistake. That and he didn't exactly want to hear Mike talk about how much he hated him. It happened nearly everyday, Will just wanted to go home and try to pretend like his life wasn't falling apart.

"Well I am angry," Mike pointed out, his voice rising. "I'm pissed off that I have to be connected to somebody I don't want to be connected to. I'm fucking pissed that all they are is sad and pathetic, I don't want to meet them, I don't want to send them happy vibes," he scoffed, shaking his head. "I want them to know that I'm sick of it. I wish they would get on some medication or something."

"Mike," Lucas groaned. "God do you have to be so mean?" He asked, frowning. "You know once you meet them you're going to take back

every bad thing you ever said. In fact I bet you'll even regret saying all this after you find them."

"Yeah right," Mike scoffed before looking towards Will. "How are you holding up? Are you sick of you soulmate too, you don't talk much about it," Mike asked, his emotions easing up some.

Will shrugged, before pulling the sleeve of his shirt down. It was getting warmer out. He knew eventually it would be summer, eventually somebody would want to go swimming. He tried to take a deep breath before smiling over at the group. "Yeah I feel them. But it's not like they feel much of anything. Just the neutral kind of emotions," he added.

Mike didn't say anything but he nodded. He wasn't about to tell them that his soulmate's emotions were sending him into a downward spiral. He knew how Mike felt, he knew the reasons behind those strong emotions.

But sometimes it was so hard. The emotional pain felt him feeling dizzy and weak at times. No matter how much regret, sadness, sorrow, and even love, Will sent through his bond with Mike, he never got anything different in return. Just the occasional confusion. Sometimes there would be excitement but Will was usually there when those surges happened. And usually it was just Mike's excitement over a new video game.

"I just want to be free," Mike said with a sigh. "I know you guys don't get that. Because you're happy with each other, and I'm happy for you! Don't get me wrong. But I feel like everyone is trying to take away my choices. I should get to pick who I want to be with. I want to pick who to love, who's right for me. I'm happy for you and Lucas, I'm happy for Max and El...but for me? I want to be free," Mike said and suddenly Will could feel the wave of sadness coming from Mike.

It was as much as a physical sensation as it was an emotional one. Mike was his soulmate, his best friend. The person he loved more than anything or anyone in the world. It hurt him to know he'd cause so much pain already. Even if Will hadn't meant to. He still felt like it was his fault. 'I'll do whatever I can to set you free, Mike,' Will thought desperately to himself. 'I'll do whatever it takes to make you

happy.'

That was how much he loved him. How much he cared. Even if Will stayed sad the rest of his life, as long as Mike was happy he'd be okay.

"Hey, it's going to be alright, man," Dustin said, throwing an arm around Mike's shoulder and pulling him a little closer. "Things are going to work out one way or another, you'll see. I promise. Everything will fall into place somehow."

"He's right," Will said gently, doing his best to give Mike a reassuring smile. "I think it's going to be okay."

"Yeah?" Mike asked, suddenly feeling hopeful. Will was the one person he could believe after all. He'd trust him with his life and if Will said it would be okay, then it had to be.

"Yeah, I really think so," Will added. "This is my stop," he said as they got closer to his house. "Text me okay, or call me. I just want you to feel better," Will whispered before pulling Mike into a quick hug of his own. "I'll see you guys tomorrow," he mumbled before taking off towards his front door followed by a series of goodbyes from his friends.

When Will got home he kept to himself most of the day. Of course he'd said hello to El, talked with her for a bit. But he didn't say anything of substance that afternoon, instead he just briefly went over how class had been, his plans for the weekend, how he hoped mom would make spaghetti for dinner.

Afterwards he held himself up in his room trying to come up with something. Mike wasn't happy and if his soulmate wasn't happy, he couldn't be happy either. There had to be something he could do. Will didn't know about the emotional link, he didn't think that would be as easy to fix but but as far as the mark went? He finally thought he might have an answer.

At dinner he tried to appear as normal as possible. Will did his best to talk just enough to convince his family that everything was as it should be. Still it seemed that there was one person who could see

through him. Usually his mother was the one to fret over him but that evening it was Hopper who spoke up first.

“You alright, Will? You seem a little off tonight,” he said before taking a bite of the noodles wrapped around his fork. “Not having soulmate trouble are you? You sure don’t talk much about them,” the man said, giving Will a look.

Why could everyone always read Will? Why couldn’t he just keep a few secrets to himself without everyone hitting the nail on the head when it came to his problems? “I mean, I don’t know them so...I wouldn’t have much to say about them,” he shrugged, taking a bite of his own food.

“Of course, but you can still feel them,” Joyce said with a slight smile. “And eventually you’ll find them. You’ll be able to put a face to the emotion,” she pointed out, not looking phased at Will’s vague response.

“Are they happy?” Hopper asked and Will felt his stomach twist with nervousness. No, he couldn’t just put everything out on the table no matter how tempting it was to confess everything that was happening. “You seem down lately, is everything okay?”

Will could feel his chest tighten and he was intensely aware of the silence as the room waited for his answer. “Yeah, I-I’m alright,” he finally managed to stutter out. “School has been kind of hard this year. I’ve just been worried about finals and everything.”

“I’m not the best at coursework but we can always find some time to sit down and go over your study guides,” Hopper said, continuing to look at Will like he was gauging him for the truth. “Just let us know if we can help, if not we’ll go track Harrington down and see if he can spare some tutoring sessions.”

Will just forced another smile and nodded. “Yeah, I’ll let you know,” he added. He decided to leave out the part where Steve made D’s and C’s throughout high school. It didn’t matter after all. Will was use to making good grades, he didn’t really need homework help unless it was math. And he had Mike for that.

'Mike,' Will thought to himself sadly. Somehow he was always creeping back into Will's mind. He needed to do something and the sooner the better.

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Will waited until everyone had gone to sleep. It was well into the night when he slipped out of bed and headed to the kitchen. He didn't know if his plan would work but it was worth a try. He'd heard things about soulmarks being impossible to damage. Something about how the cells repaired the skin tissue faster than average. Will had decided that it was worth a try.

He pulled open a kitchen drawer and searched through it for a moment. Sighing in relief when he found what he'd been looking for. A large metal serving spoon with an old wooden handle. It had been around a while but he hardly ever seen his mother use it. Maybe during holidays when every other serving utensil was being used she'd pull it out, mainly because it was the only one left.

After he grabbed the spoon out of the drawer he started to search for something else. He padded back into the living room until he spotted the lighter sitting on the coffee table. He knew both his mother and Hopper were trying to cut down on the smoking but it was still fairly easy to find a lighter and a pack of cigarettes laying around their house.

He pocketed the lighter and tiptoed back to his room and shut the door behind him. Will sat on his bed for a few minutes, listening to the sounds of the house as he tried to find out if he'd woken anyone else or not. When the house remained just as still and silent as before, he got back up and turned his light on. Slowly he pulled his shirt off and stared down at his real soulmark. It was pretty and delicate and it looked just like Mike's.

It made Will want to cry. His eyes pricked with tears as his let his fingers trace the swirled pattern. He'd always wanted Mike to be his soulmate. Why had getting everything he'd wanted have to hurt so much? He rubbed roughly at his eyes with the back of his hand before moving to stand in front of his bedroom mirror. With one hand he held the spoon and with the other he flicked the lighter, holding the flame under the silver metal.

He kept it there for a good five minutes, making sure that he wouldn't screw it up. He kept the spoon directly under the flame of the lighter, trying to make sure it was evenly heated before he summoned all his nerve and courage. After another two minutes he sat the lighter down and grabbed his discarded shirt, balling it up and biting down into the fabric. Without a second thought Will quickly pressed the scorching metal down into his skin, right on top of his soulmark.

He bite down roughly, his eyes squeezing shut at the pain as he focused on not screaming. Five seconds, six seconds, seven seconds, he counted down in his head as his fingers trembled and his legs started to go weak. The moment he hit ten seconds he let the spoon fall from his hand. Tears ran down his face as tried to get his breathing under control. When he looked down at his chest his stomach sank.

While the skin around his mark had clearly been burned and was already starting to welt up in angry red blisters, his soulmark looked untouched. The flesh that surrounded the colorful mark was damaged from the burn, his soulmark didn't look any different. So...apparently they were right about not being able to damage soulmarks.

Will didn't have it in him to swear, instead he squeezed his eyes shut again and hissed out in pain. Of course it hadn't worked, but he'd been so hopeful. Somewhere in the back of his head he knew it had been a long shot. He gritted his teeth as he inspected the new burn. That had been the only idea he'd had to get rid of the mark. He could try to keep coming up with new ways but if a burn didn't do it, Will doubted much else could touch the mark.

He did what he could to ignore the pain and instead busied himself with putting everything back where he'd found it. He put the lighter back on the coffee table, he put the cooling spoon back into the drawer and finally pulled a new shirt over his head. He could deal with everything else tomorrow.

Will had been so caught up in the physical pain that he'd been oblivious to the emotion flooding his bond with Mike. Fear. If Will had been focused on everything else, he might have been able to feel the sensation of worry and panic that came over his soulmate.

He was too lost in his own feelings to notice anything else. He just needed to sleep, he needed to escape the pain for a while. When Mike did find out, Will was sure he'd hate him. He'd lose his best friend and his soulmate. Or if Mike never found out he'd still probably be angry at his unknown match. They'd go on being best friends while Mike unknowingly hated him. To Will it still seemed like the best option.

Finally he got back into bed, laying on his back because of the pain on his chest. He closed his eyes and let sleep overcome him.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you all so much for reading! You guys are always so nice and sweet in the comments! <3 I always feel so lucky to have people comment and leave kudos. The I hope you enjoy this chapter and hopefull a new one will be out sometime next week!

"They did something," Mike muttered as he stepped aside so that Lucas could step into his. "My soulmate...something happened," he said with a sigh before setting down on the edge of his bed.

"Is that why you weren't in class today?" Lucas asked, setting down next to him. "I mean, no offensive or anything but I didn't think you cared about your soulmate...like at all," Lucas replied looking around Mike's bedroom. "When you said emergency I thought you'd be calling everyone over."

"No!" Mike stiffened. "No, just you. Dustin wouldn't let me live it down and I don't think Will...well I just don't think it's something he'd want to deal with. He seems to be doing just fine with his own soulmate," Mike confessed with a suppressed sadness. "I didn't want to bother him."

"I think he would have understood, he was worried about you today. Anyway, now that I'm here do you mind trying to explain what this thing is they did?" Lucas asked, flopping back onto the bed while Mike continued to sit on the edge, staring down at the floor.

"I don't know how to describe it. I think they might have done something to their mark though?" Mike started, wincing at how badly he was at trying to convey what he'd felt last night. "They hurt, I can feel that. Emotionally they're a mess. But last night I woke up and my soulmark was burning, like...fire almost. I could feel how raw they felt, like just turmoil inside," Mike finished, running a hand through his hair. "Maybe I've been too mean to them...like through the bond."

"You think?" Lucas asked, forcing himself to sit up on his elbows. "You think they did something to the mark?" He asked curiously. He knew that it was impossible to alter or remove them. At the very least it would take seriously bodily injury. "They couldn't have done much to it if you still feel them. It would take a plane crash or an explosion to even scar the mark."

"No, I still feel them. They've been nervous today. I've tried hard not to send anything through the bond. I'm just...fuck how do you say it?" Mike asked, throwing his head back and staring at his ceiling. Years ago he'd stuck glow in the dark stars up there. They were still there, at night they still glowed. It was easier for Mike to look at them then at Lucas. "I've said a lot of bad stuff. They've felt all the bad stuff I put out...I never wanted them to hurt themselves."

"Well we don't know if that's what they did. Maybe they have reasons besides you to be sad?" Lucas suggested softly, trying to lighten Mike's guilt. "Maybe just try not to be so hard on them from here on out, yeah? They have feelings too. I'm sure it's been rough having a soulmate who never sends anything to them but anger."

"Yeah, it's just hard. They're out there in the world feeling all these different things and I'm out here feeling things. What am I meant to do when they're upset?" Mike said, giving Lucas a confused look.

"Seriously? You're seventeen, we shouldn't have to go over basic human emotions. If they're sad just try to send them positivity. Try to give them some reassurance. If they're scared try to send calmness, come on Mike, it's not rocket science. It's called empathy," Lucas said with an eye roll. "Admit that you're worried about them."

Mike knew his friends were good about sending each other comfort when things were hard. Whenever Dustin was home sick Lucas was always worried, trying to send him love and support. When Max was having a bad day at home, El could always tell and she'd be out the door trying to get to her.

"Okay fine, I'm worried about them," Mike said throwing his hands up in defeat. "But they felt so awful last night and heart broken and I didn't know what to do and even now I don't know how to find them."

“How does anyone find their soulmate, just be observant. Try to get out there and meet new people, and stop sending your soulmate angry stuff. They know you were directing it at them,” Lucas said gently. He wanted Mike to know that everybody screwed up sometimes. But he wasn't doing his soulmate any favors by being upset with them all the time.

The two stayed silent for a long few seconds before Mike spoke back up. “Sometimes they send me love. Like the emotion, I don't know how to describe but I know it's love. It's the feeling that no matter what they'll always care about me, that they would do anything for me,” Mike whispered, trying to stop himself from getting emotional himself. “I've been really awful. They send me affection and I send them hate.”

“Hey, it's going to be alright,” Lucas said, sitting up fully and putting a hand on Mike's shoulder. “Just let them know you're capable of feeling more than just anger. And Mike nobody expects you to fall in love with your soulmate overnight. Sometimes just being their friend is enough. You have to admit, you probably want the person who's meant to match you in every way around at least in some sense.”

“Yeah, I guess...” Mike trailed off, finally feeling some of the guilt lift. Lucas was right, he didn't have to fall madly in love with his soulmate the minute he seen them but if the soulmate biology is really perfect, that person, his soulmate, should get him better than anyone else. It would be kinda nice to have that around. “Are you staying for dinner?”

“I would but I've got to get home, almost forgot to tell you, we've got a math test tomorrow. I'd study if I were you,” Lucas said, getting up and smoothing out the wrinkles in his shirt. “I'll see you tomorrow, and remember, empathy,” He said with a smile before seeing himself out.

The hot water from the shower stung Will's poorly healing burn. It had been nearly a week and instead of starting to look better, Will

had started to worry that it was infected. Of course his soulmark looked perfect, just as before, but the skin around it had blistered and opened, refusing to scab over or show any signs of healing.

He'd done the best he could at cleaning it up and taking care of it. But Will didn't know better, wound care wasn't something he'd ever needed to think about. When he was younger, he was at the doctors so often that even the smallest scrap or cut was fixed by someone else. Or his mom would patch him up or even his brother could manage putting a bandaid on something. Will could even think about all the times Mike had done it for him. Will always hated the sight of blood. When he really thought of it, Mike had always taken care of his bumps and bruises when they were out in the woods or somewhere too far from their houses.

Will wished he could have that again. He wanted Mike to tell him that it would be okay. Band-aids couldn't fix everything though, certainly not this.

He hurried to wash his hair, fighting to ignore the pain in his chest before turning the water off and rushing to grab a towel to wrap himself up with. Despite the warmer weather, Will still got cold easily. He cracked the bathroom door open while he brushed his teeth, letting some of the steam filter out of the room. Afterwards he peeked around the corner to make sure nobody was around while he made his way to his out.

Once safely back in his room, Will set about getting dressed. He loved his family but they weren't exactly the best at knocking. And if they did, they seldom waited for a response before entering. It made getting dressed a race against time. Nobody could see his chest. They couldn't see his real soulmark and now they certainly couldn't see the open wound he'd inflicted on himself. He could only imagine what they would say.

After he was dressed, he still wasn't in the clear. Because next came an even more complicated process. He needed to redraw his soulmark. Will took a seat on his bed, reaching into his nightstand drawer and pulling out his most used markers. It had to be perfect, exactly the same everyday. He was getting good at it though, instead of taking a full five minutes, Will had knocked it down to about two.

He had to be careful with letting people see. The marker worked for a quick glance but it didn't look nearly as realistic as a real mark. The real soulmark looked like a tattoo, clean and sharp and in perfect. Will's looked like...well like somebody had drawn it with a marker.

Even with his time crunch Will still hadn't gotten caught. It would be easier if he could lock his door. But, as luck would have it, his lock broke a couple years ago. Hopper hadn't ever gotten around to fixing it and it had never been an issue before. Of course though, Will knew the day would come when he'd get caught red handed. He just didn't think it would be so soon.

"Will, can I borrow your...what are you doing?" El asked, busting into the room before standing still and staring at him with wide curious eyes.

Will felt his heart jump into his throat and his stomach drop with fear. "El, I...I can explain," he whispered. He could explain how? Like hadn't been caught by his step sister with a marker in hand clearly faking a soulmark.

"What are you doing?" She asked, her voice lowering the second time around as she quickly stepped into the room and shut the door behind her.

"Please, El, you can't tell mom. You can't tell anyone, please. They won't understand," Will said frantically, dropping the marker and pleading with her.

"Will, are you drawing your mark on?" She asked. There was no hint of anger in her voice, just confusion. Almost a sadness as well. "That's not your real soulmark?" She asked, shaking her head like she couldn't believe it. "You've been hiding it?"

"You have to promise me, El. Please, I need your word that you aren't going to say anything. You know I wouldn't ask you to keep it a secret if it wasn't important," Will said, getting up from the bed and grabbing the other's hand. "Please promise."

El's mouth fell open for a minute but she stayed silent, like she didn't know what to say. She just didn't understand why Will would feel

like he couldn't be honest about his soulmark. It hurt in a way that he'd hidden it from her. They were always open and honest. They were friends. They didn't lie to each other. "Explain," she said, a frown forming on her face. "And I promise I won't tell," she sighed in defeat.

Will took a deep breath of his own before slowly letting go of her hand, his head down in guilt. After a moment he lifted his arm up with his half finished soulmark and confessed. "Yeah, El, it's fake. This one isn't real. But...I had it to hide it," he mumbled, finding his way back to his bed and flopping down.

"The real mark-I know who's my match," he went on to say. "It's Mike," he whispered, running a hand down his face. In a way it felt like a weight had been lifted. Like he wasn't carrying the world on his shoulders anymore. He was finally, somewhat, free from his secret.

"Will," El said softly, moving to sit next to him. "Why are you hiding it? Do you not want to be with Mike?" She asked, placing a hand on his knee, trying to find some way to comfort him.

"Of course I do," he said softly, glancing at her. "But he hates me."

"What do you mean?" El asked, her voice sounding even more confused than before. "Mike doesn't hate you, he loves you."

"No, Mike hates his soulmate. You've heard him talk before. And I'm his soulmate so...it's not hard to figure out. El, he's my best friend, he's everything to me. I can't lose him. But if he finds out that I'm his match, he'll hate me. You seen how upset he was when you and him weren't soulmates. He'll blame me for ruining everything for him."

El shook her head again and her eyes seemed sadder. "I don't think that's true," she mumbled. "Mike doesn't mean those things and he could never hate you. Never, Will. I'm sure of it."

It would be so nice to believe those words. Will wanted desperately to cling to those words and take them to heart. But it wasn't that easy. And maybe El believed those things but Will just couldn't bring himself to.

When Will stayed silent El moved to take his hand in hers. "It'll be okay, I promise," she said softly. "I won't tell. But I think you should. You can't hide it forever."

"I know," Will whispered, trying to keep himself from crying. "It's been better...he use to just send me angry feelings. Now he doesn't send much of anything. Sometimes softer emotions, but mainly nothing," Will said. "I know I can't hide it forever. But I just need more time. I don't think I'm ready."

"Okay," El nodded understandingly. "Can I see it? The mark I mean," she said and Will froze back up.

"Please, El, not yet. I know it's stupid but...I just can't, I can't not yet," Will whispered, shaking his head frantically, feeling himself on the verge of panic. He'd averted one crisis, El probably wouldn't keep his secret if she knew what else he'd done. How far he'd taken things.

"Okay, it's okay, Will. I won't make you, not yet," she said, hurrying to calm him down. "Just please think about it. And think about telling Mike, I know he won't hate you," she said gently before letting go of his hand. "Sleep, it's late," she said, forcing a smile. "I love you," she added before getting up and quickly kissing the top of Will's head. "I'll see you in the morning. Thank you for telling me."

"I love you too," Will said, trying to stay composed. He didn't want her to see him cry. But as soon as she left, Will felt himself start to break down. Something happened though, something that hadn't ever happened before. The bond between him and his soulmate surged and he could feel something. Not frustration or anger like he usually got when he was upset. But instead he was filled with the sensation of comfort. Mike had never offered him that before.

It was true that he wasn't sending as many hurtful emotions as before and sometimes he'd even send gentle emotions. Will couldn't explain it too well but it was like he was saying 'I'm tolerating this bond, I'm tolerating you,' but in a softer way.

Still though he'd never offered actual comfort before. It was like holding hands with El or being hugged by his mom, or having Hopper ruffle his hair. It was like when Mike was right there next to

him promising him that he was safe. All of that in a nonverbal sense. Not yet love but ‘Don’t be upset, things will work out,’ it was like that.

Will hurried to finish up his soulmark drawing before crawling into bed and sending his own wave of emotion back. Pure gratitude.

For the next few days, things continued just as before. Will would get up, go to school, see his friends, come home, pretend like his soulmate wasn’t the boy he’d known since kindergarten, and go to sleep so he could get up and do it all again the next day.

El had kept her promise though. Ever since that one year, El had made it very clear that promises were important to her. Mike had been fairly silent through the bond though and it allowed Will to think clearly for the first time in what seemed like ages.

He still didn’t have any plans on telling anyone else, especially not Mike, but he was still aware that he couldn’t keep it to himself forever. Well, he could try but it was going to be pretty hard.

Will didn’t have to think too hard about those things right at the moment though. He was currently preoccupied with studying for his finals. Sadly not much studying had been accomplished. Not when it was him and the whole party down in Mike’s basement. They were in high school, they should have known just how hard it was to study together. Nothing ever seemed to get done.

Like always Dustin was rambling about something and Lucas was trying to keep him focused but he was busy arguing with Mike about why he was right. About what? Will couldn’t be sure. Max and El had broken off into in their own conversation, discussing weekend plans and what pizza to order.

“Guys,” Will groaned, grabbing a single popcorn kernel and tossing it at the three boys. “Please? I’m already getting a D in history, I don’t wanna fail,” he said, trying to plead with the group.

El wouldn't be able to help him much, she was still a little behind them and not currently attending their public high school, but he expected more from the rest of them. He knew for a fact Lucas had never failed history, he'd never even gotten below a B. Mike and Dustin were doing pretty good too. "I promised I'd help you guys with art if you helped me with history," he added. Thankfully that was his lowest grade. The group as a whole were known to get good grades, but everyone had that one problem class they needed extra help with.

"I know, sorry," Mike said first, sitting up a little straighter and grabbing his notes. "It's Dustin's fault," he teased but moved closer to Will so that he could see what he was doing.

"It's absolutely not my fault, we've been doing this for like two hours already. I can't concentrate, I need more snacks and a break," Dustin huffed, falling backwards onto the floor and groaning.

"Oh come on, it's not that bad," Lucas said, trying to haul his soulmate back up into a sitting position. "We can have a snack afterwards."

"He's right, we've been at it for a minute now," Max said, she was getting restless herself. "Maybe a short break?" She suggested, glancing around the small group.

"Are you hungry?" Mike asked, shifting some to look at Will. All day he hadn't said much. Especially if it didn't involve school work directly. Mike was starting to find it odd. Will usually wasn't that quiet, he usually had plenty of things to talk about. "You alright? You haven't talked much today."

"I'm alright, just a little stressed," Will admitted, looking down at the pile of homework and study guides. "That and I haven't felt very good."

It wasn't exactly lie. Will hadn't felt good the last few days. His body seemed to ache and he couldn't seem to shake his headache. Not only that but it felt like any and all energy he had was quickly drained. He was sure he was coming down with a cold. Pile on homework and soulmate issues, of course he'd be stressed.

“You’re soulmate stressing you out?” Dustin asked and instantly Will tensed up some, noticing how Mike did the same. Lately soulmates weren’t something they mentioned, not when it was such a sore topic for Mike.

“No, no it’s not that,” Will said, shaking his head. “I just haven’t felt that good,” Will shrugged. “My soulmate doesn’t have anything to do with it.” Will was almost positive he could feel Mike relax some

“What about you, Mike. You haven’t said much about your soulmate at all,” Dustin added and everyone around in the room seemed to make an exasperated sound.

“Hey!” Mike said defensively. “I can talk about them without getting upset!” He huffed. “I just don’t like talking about it.”

Will wanted to shrink some when he felt a wave of hostility in his bond. El had seemed to perk up some as she watched the exchange carefully.

“I still don’t like them, I still don’t want a soulmate and they’re still a crybaby, other than not much has changed,” Mike went on to say, folding his arms across his chest while Will stared at the floor. Lucas gave him an exasperated sigh but El narrowed her eyes at him.

“You don’t mean that,” she said, speaking up and surprising Mike. He gave her a brief look of confusion before his face hardened some again.

“I think I know what I mean, El,” he said in a matter of fact tone. It was almost cold the way he’d said, like he still wasn’t over everything. “My soulmate is always crying and I still think the idea is stupid. Like I said before, I don’t want anything to do with them. I’ve just been trying to keep the bond empty.”

“Take it back,” El said, this time her expression was angry and everyone around them seemed confused and taken back, especially Mike. Will on the other hand just wanted to dispare. “Stop saying those things about your soulmate, you don’t mean them.”

“I mean everything I say,” Mike said back, his voice clipped and

holding his own anger. "I don't want to hear you try to tell me how I feel. It's not like you'd understand anyway, you have your soulmate." The tone of the conversation had clearly went from disagreement to fight. "You're the last person I want to talk to about this with."

"I told you not to bring up soulmates," Lucas hissed while El and Mike continued to go back and forth, things quickly heating up.

"It's not my fault Mike is a cold and heartless," Dustin pointed out, clearly upset that he'd gotten blamed for starting the fight.

"How can you say that about the person you're meant to be with?" El asked, standing up glaring at Mike. "You don't care that you're hurting them?"

"They hurt me! And in case you haven't noticed, it's not exactly easy on this end either. I got stuck with the most depressed, nervous, fucking /broken/ person on the planet! And nobody but me has to deal with it, I have to deal with an emotional mess who has a breakdown every couple of days, not you!" Mike spat, standing up to match El. Of course he was much taller and Max quickly got up to stand next to El.

Max got nervous like that. Of course Mike would never hurt anyone but Max came from a home where sometimes things liked that happened and it eased her own nerves to be standing close to her soulmate.

"Guys! It's not worth fighting about!" Dustin quickly said, trying to do damage control. "Come on, let's just drop it, we've got homework to do."

"Take it back, take everything you just said back! You can't talk about him like that," El hissed, seething with anger, so much that the glasses that had been on the coffee table started to shake with her energy.

"What do you mean him?" Mike asked, looking at El. When he didn't get an answer he scoffed and shook his head. Mike didn't know it, but El had slipped up. He could brush it off, maybe she'd mixed her words up a bit. Nobody but two of them knew the difference.

“Will, let’s go, we need to be home for dinner,” El said, her voice still cold as she reached out and helped the other off the floor.

“Nobody has to leave,” Mike snapped before sending Will an apologetic look. “We don’t even have to fight about it. I just want to drop it.” When El didn’t say anything, Max and her busy picking up their things, he went on to add, “At least let Will stay.”

“Sorry Mike,” he mumbled sadly. “I really have to go home for dinner. I’ll see you tomorrow,” he whispered before following El out the door.

“Wow, good going. You kind of fucking blew it,” Lucas said, shaking his head.

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you all for leaving such nice comments and kudos! All of you really my motivation to right <3 and thank you for being so patient for updates! ((I edited it a bit! Still pretty sloppy but better!))

For the last several days Will had felt cold. It was far from a possession type of cold though. Every time he brushed up against a surface he could feel the coolness against his skin. That was how he'd known he had a fever. His skin was hot and he still remained chilled. That and every other symptom he had. He felt drained of energy, his body seemed to ache, and standing up left rooms spinning for a bit.

He wanted to believe it was the flu, that was the easiest answer. Deep down though Will knew exactly why he was sick. Part of it frightened him but anyone finding out...that scared him a whole lot more. He pulled his shirt up as he stared in the mirror. "Ouch," Will hissed when his fabric grazed his chest.

His burn was clearly infected. The area was red and hot to the touch. Of course his soulmark was just fine, it was just all the skin around it that had blistered and opened. It was ironic if Will was honest with himself. The one thing he wanted to get rid of looked just as good as ever. However he still managed to damage the rest of his skin and create an open wound. "Oh my God," Will groaned before letting the shirt fall back down. "It's not getting any better."

For the time being though Will needed to push away the lightheaded feeling and the body aches. It was Friday, he could deal with everything later. He'd take a couple aspirin and he'd be fine, he'd get through it. He always did. He finished getting dressed for the day and grabbed his bag before heading to the kitchen. He knew everyone was up already. Will had been sleeping later and later in the morning. The day enforce his mom had come in at least twice to wake him up. He'd completely slept through his alarms.

"Morning," he mumbled, giving his family a short smile. El and Hopper were sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast while his mom was standing over the sink finishing up the dishes. "Do we have any orange juice?" He asked, making his way to the fridge.

"Mhm, I was at the store yesterday and picked some up," Joyce said, turning around to give her youngest a smile. The warm expression quickly fell and was replaced with a look of concern. "Will, honey? Are you feeling okay, you look pale." Right away everyone had their eyes on him.

"Yeah, just...a little tired," Will said quickly, taking a step back when his mom reached out to touch his forehead. "Seriously, I just stayed up too late."

Joyce however wasn't buying it. Her frown deepened and she reached back out for Will, this time pressing the back of her hand to his head. "You've got a fever," she said, her tone clearly worried. "How long have felt sick for?" She asked and Will quickly shook his head.

"I don't feel bad at all," Will said. "I'm probably just warm cause I've only just gotten out of bed. I slept with too many blankets or something." The lie sounded ridiculous even to himself. Will's life was quickly becoming a series of lies. Lie after lie after lie and he was doing all he could to keep up with them. But the old saying was right. One lie only leads to another.

"Are you sure? You don't look like you feel very well," Joyce frowned, folding her arms across her chest. She wasn't quite buying it and Will could tell.

"I'm positive. Really, if I start to feel bad I'll call you to come get me, okay?" Will mumbled, pulling the juice out of the fridge and doing his best to give her another smile.

"You'll have to call me today, kid," Hopper spoke up from the table. "I've got the day off and your mom is going to visit your grandma." He sat his coffee down and looked Will over before giving him his own look of worry. "Don't hesitate alright, Will? If you get sick just call and I'll pick you up."

“Are you sure you don’t want to say home today?” Joyce asked as Will poured himself a glass. “El wouldn’t mind the company and you two will have Jim all to yourselves. You don’t get that too often,” she said, trying to convince Will. “Or at least let me drive you.”

“Really, I’m fine mom. Please don’t worry so much,” Will said. “I promise and you know I’ll call if I don’t feel good and you don’t need to drive me because I’m honestly not sick.”

“I’m walking Max to school today, I’ll make sure he gets there okay,” El offered, getting an approving smile from both Joyce and Jim.

“Alright well...I guess if you insist on going. Just let somebody know if you want to come home,” Joyce sighed. “Tomorrow is Saturday so you can get caught up some rest then. And if you still have a fever when you get home it’s off to bed,” Joyce said, already setting up the rules.

“I won’t have a fever, I don’t have one now,” Will lied, taking a sip of his drink and hosting his bag up higher. “I love you okay? I’ll see you when your done with grandma. El are you ready?”

“Slow down kid, aren’t you going to eat?” Hopper asked, pointing out that Will hadn’t had grabbed breakfast.

“I’m going to eat at school,” he said before finishing off what was left of drink. Just another lie. Will hadn’t had an appetite for the last couple of days. But at least El wouldn’t know and he could always explain to his friends that he’d eaten at home if they asked. Will knew the lies needed to stop but they seemed to be getting out of control even for him.

“Alright, be safe you two. I love you both and I’ll see you when I get home,” Joyce said, letting El and Will finally take off.

Will hadn’t exactly gotten a chance to talk to El about how she’d blown up at Mike the other day. He wasn’t sure what he’d say about it anyway. He was use to having protective siblings but he hoped that El knew she didn’t have to do that. Dealing with Mike’s feelings towards his soulmate was something Will was quickly becoming use to.

In a way it was nice to have El stand up for him. They were close like that and when Jonathan had moved out for college it had really helped to have her there. It eased that pain of missing his brother so much. She had to know that once Mike made up his mind about something it was hard to get him to change it. She had dated him for nearly four years. She knew him well, just like Will did.

“Are you okay?” El asked softly as they headed towards Max’s house. “You haven’t said much. You aren’t mad at me are you?” She asked, an edge of worry in her voice.

“What would I be mad about?” Will asked, glancing over at her. “You mean about what happened with Mike the other day?” He asked, trying to clarify.

“Yeah, you aren’t upset that I...” El trailed off while she searched for the word she wanted to use. She had come a long way but sometimes she still struggled to make the sentences fit together how she wanted them to or recall the word that fit the best.

“Interfere?” Will asked, shoving his hands into his pockets before looking back over her.

“Interfere?” El asked, giving him a confused look in the process.

“Uh, interfere, uh kind of like intrude? Like you got involved in something that you didn’t have to?” Will suggested, trying to help her define the word. “It doesn’t matter El, I understand what you mean,” he added, knowing that he probably wasn’t as good as a dictionary meaning. “And I’m not mad.”

“Promise?” El asked, giving Will an almost sad look. Like she was actually worried that Will would be angry with her.

“I know you had a good intentions. If somebody was saying something about you like that I probably would have gotten mad too. Even if they didn’t know they were directly talking about you. I’m not mad, I promise.”

El nodded before finally offering Will a grateful smile. “I’ll try not to do it again. But I don’t think I can let Mike say things like that,” she

sighed, shaking her head. "Are you sure you aren't sick?" She added after a short few seconds.

"Eh, I'm okay. I'll probably feel better once I get to school," Will could only hope he was right. The short walk had somehow become exhausting and he was glad that they were nearly to Max's house. Will didn't feel like he had any energy at all. Every step made him ache in some way. All he wanted to do was get to school and sit down before he actually fainted.

El looked at him skeptically before slowly nodding. "Okay, if you say," she sighed, knowing that Will probably was sick but trusting him enough to believe that he'd make it through the day. "I'll go knock," she said as they got to Max's house. Will waited on the sidewalk while El went up to go and get her soulmate for class.

"Will, are you sure you're feeling alright?" Mike asked for the third time that day. "Come on, I can tell that you don't.

Study hall was the blank hour that had been reserved for homework, studying, and getting extra help. However, everyone knew what study hall was actually for. It was a chance to text and talk and catch up with friends. Mrs Burtz, how had given up on making study hour a productive hour years ago, didn't care too much about what everyone got up to. As long as nobody was setting any fires it would remain a blank hour.

"Okay, okay," Will huffed. "I think I've got a cold. Don't worry though, I'll probably have to spend the weekend in bed," Will sighed, tapping his pen against the desk. A lie. But will was too tired to care. 'Friends don't lie,' he thought to himself and winced inwardly. They didn't lie no, but nobody would understand. This was something that Will couldn't help.

"Well, if your feeling up to it maybe I can come and keep you company on Saturday? I think I can convince at least one of your parents to let me inside," Mike said, giving the other a hopeful look.

Will knew at some point he would have to start feeling better. He'd go home and start taking some pain killers, drinking more water, maybe he'd try to get some more sleep too. That would probably help tremendously. "Yeah, that would be good," Will smiled and he could feel a sense of happiness in the bond he shared. Something more like affection but it made him feel warm all over.

"I'll bring over some soup or something," Mike said. "We can just lay around and watch movies," he said.

That sounded great to Will. There was only an hour or so left in the school day and laying down was the one thing he wanted most.

*

Eventually study hall came to an end. The only problem was that Will's last class was gym. Normally it wasn't terrible. It was never wonderful, Will didn't love gym but he could tolerate it. It could have been worse. They would run some laps, do some push ups and then play basketball or dodgeball at the end of the class. No big deal.

It wasn't when Will actually felt good. He changed into his gym clothes anyway and braced himself for the worst of it. He just had to get through 60 minutes and then he could go home.

"Byers, come on where's the hustle? It's a jog not a walk," the coach yelled and Will groaned, knowing that he needed to go faster around the gym. He needed to try to keep up with everyone or the coach might make him do an extra lap.

But his lungs were burning and his muscles were on fire as well. Everything hurt and his head was starting to pound. Moving was becoming more and more difficult.

One lap down, three more to go. Will wasn't sure he could do it. He didn't want to think about the next three laps. He wished he had Dustin or Lucas with him. Somehow though they had all managed to get gym in the morning. Will was stuck on his own at the moment.

On his second lap around he could feel himself growing exhausted.

Not only that but his stomach was turning and he could feel his sweat turn cold. Will felt sick and he could feel the bile start to rise up in his throat. 'No. Not here.' He thought to himself. But it was that feeling, that sensation of knowing your about to be sick. That it was definitely going to happen. Will darted off the gym floor, sprinting to the locker rooms.

"Byers? Byers! Where are you going?!" The coach yelled out but Will continued to run.

"I'm gonna be sick!" He called out, not daring for to stop until he reached the boy's locker room. He doped down to the trash can and started to spill the bitter contents of his stomach. It felt like forever he was there on the locker room floor dry heaving and wincing when he could only manage to expel stomach acid. He was so glad that he'd skipped all meals that day.

When he was sure he was finished, he groaned and shifted away from the trash can, moving so that he could sit against the wall for a bit. He felt terrible and he just wanted to cry. The locker room floor wasn't some place he'd ever normally sit but in that moment he couldn't care. It took effort he didn't know he had to eventually get back up.

Will didn't wait for the bell to ring before he packed everything up. The coach would understand when he didn't return to class. He didn't even bother to change into his clothes. He just grabbed his bag and headed out to the halls.

He felt disgusting but the fresh air helped a bit. Not as much as he'd like but it cleared his head some. Like always he waited for Mike, trying to come up with an excuse as to why he didn't change back. It couldn't have been too long that Will was outside waiting before Mike showed up.

"Hey, you're here early. Usually I'm the one who waits for you," Mike said, adjusting his bag before the two of them took off walking. "What's with the clothes?"

"I got out of gym early, the coach went ahead and let us leave but I didn't feel like changing back today. I guess I'm a bit tied," Will laughed, shrugging his shoulders and shoving his hands into the

pockets of gym shorts.

"You mean sick?" Mike asked, raising an eyebrow. "It's alright, you should probably change right into your pajamas anyway. Get to bed when you get home," Mike added gently.

"I probably will, but you're still coming over tomorrow?" Will asked as they continued to walk. Neither lived far from the school. It was always a short walk to and from. But today it seemed like it was miles away from his house. His mouth still tasted bitter and vile from throwing up and his muscles felt weak and unsteady. He rubbed a hand down his face and forced himself to focus. They weren't far, even if Mike's house was a bit closer it wouldn't be long before he could be at home.

"Yeah, I'll come over probably around noon, I'll give you a chance to sleep in," Mike laughed, adjusting his bag some and giving Will a small smile. "But um, actually...I kind of wanted to talk to you about something. I've been meaning to ask you for a while now."

Will rubbed at his eyes again, his vision was doing something strange and Mike's voice was starting to become hard to focus on. But he continued to put one foot in front of the other. 'You're almost home, not far,' he thought to himself before looking back at Mike. "You mean give yourself a chance to sleep in?" He mumbled before going on. "Yeah, what's up?" He asked, wishing he had the ability to form a better sentence. It was taking all of Will's concentration to stay upright though.

"Well, I've been thinking about this for a long time and I just...sometimes it's hard to find the nerve to ask people something. I'd really like to...I know you're still kind of into the soulmate thing but if you'd let me I'd like to..." Mike trailed off, his eyes slowly traveling back to Will. "Will?" He asked, his tone changing suddenly from nervous to concerned. "Will, are you okay? You look really pale," Mike said, stopping and reaching out to grab ahold of Will's shoulder. "Hey, Will talk to me."

"Can we just stop for a second?" Will asked, blinking quickly as the world around him started to spin. "I'm not feeling very good," he mumbled, everything seeming impossibly far away. "I just need a

minute,” he said, his voice slurring as everything started to go black.

“Will!” Mike called out, quickly catching the other teen before he could hit the ground. That was the last thing Will heard before everything faded away.

**

He woke back up to the sound of someone honking a car horn. He forced his eyes open only to be met with Mike’s brown eyes staring down at him with concern. “What happened?” He asked, glancing around. A car, they were in a car. “Mike?”

“Hey buddy, it’s going to be okay, we’re getting you to the hospital,” Jim called out from the front seat. “Your mom is going to meet us there,” the man said, never taking his eyes off the road while he weaved through traffic. “Just hold on okay, Will?”

Will’s eyes started to adjust some but not by much. He had his head in Mike’s lap while he gently ran his fingers through Will’s hair. El was staring at him with a look of fear from the passenger seat while Hopper drove frantically towards the hospital. “You called hopper?” Will asked, finding that his words still sounded slurred and off.

“You passed out,” Mike said, keeping his fingers running through Will’s damp hair, trying to push some of his bangs out of his face. “Just relax okay? Everything is going to be fine. We’re almost there,” He said gently while Will’s word started to fade back out. All he could remember thinking was that whatever happened next wasn’t going to end well.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you all so much! I loved writing this and I've got some new ideas and I'm excited to get started on them! I really hope you enjoy the ending and that it didn't fall short. I felt like this was a good place to finish it up. All the comments and kudos really kept me motivated! Thank you again and I'll see you next time! (More sloppy editing but I'll fix it soon)

Will wasn't sure if it was the frantic voices around him or the bright fluorescent lightening that woke him up. But when he opened his eyes again he knew he was in the hospital. His first thoughts took him back to a several winters ago. He shot up off the emergency room bed and he quickly started to look around.

"Will, honey it's okay! It's alright, we're here, you're fine," Joyce said, placing a hand on Will's back and rubbing small circles there. "You're just sick is all. But the doctors are going to take care of you," she said, trying to calm him down.

Will continued to look around, only relaxing when he spotted Mike at the end of his bed, staring at him with concern. "Will, it's okay. Everything will be alright," Mike said softly while the nurses continued to shuffle around the room.

Hopper was there too and if Will remember right El wouldn't be far either. That's right, he was just sick. No monsters, no upside down. Just sick and while it was a strange thing to be relieved about, Will was. At least it was just that.

"Alright, Will, we need to get you in a hospital gown so we can we start hooking you up to some fluids. You've got a pretty high fever and your white blood count is up. We'll start you on some medicine here in a moment," A nurse said warmly as she joined Joyce on the other side of the bed. "Can I help you with your shirt?"

“No!” Will said quickly, leaving everyone in shock. “No, no please I don’t wanna wear that,” he mumbled, trying to scoot further away from the nurse. He knew he sounded ridiculous but Mike was right there, everyone was there.

“Will, what’s wrong?” Joyce asked, her eyebrows furrowing in concern. “It’s just a hospital gown. They want to put an IV in, it’s easier for them if your wearing something thinner,” she said, trying to explain to Will why he needed to.

“No,” He said, shaking his head and moving away from her touch. “No,” he mumbled again. Will was still feeling terrible, he was cold and tired and sore. And sick. Mainly Will just felt sick.

“I don’t understand,” Joyce said a little softer, glancing at Jim for a solution. “I’m sorry, he’s never refused before.”

“It’s probably the fever and dehydration. Sometimes it makes them a little foggy, he could be out of it right now. It’s alright though, we can cut it off if we have to,” the nurse said, her tone still kind and warm. But Will’s eyes widened and he wondered if there was any way to still save himself.

“Will, Dear, put your arms up for me,” the nurse instructed, leaving no room for arguments. “The quicker your get dressed out the sooner we can start giving you some medicine. The doctor is going to want do some more tests and he’ll want to monitor your heart. We need to be able to get to your chest and back for that. I can’t with this shirt on.”

Slowly Will glanced around the room before finally giving in and lifting his arms up. He knew he couldn’t keep everything a secret forever. It was only a matter of time. He closed his eyes and let the nurse help him out of his shirt and like he expected, he heard the shocked gasp of his mother.

“Will what have you done to yourself?!” She asked, her eyes wide as she stared at the wound on his chest. “Is that...what is that?! What did you do?” She asked, trying to understand.

“I thought your soulmark was on your arm,” Jim said, carefully

stepping around the bed and reaching for Will's other arm while Will sat there knowing how exposed he was.

"Oh this is infected," the nurse said, quickly opening up some drawers and finding something to start cleaning it with. "This is the cause of the bacteria," she said, looking over at Joyce. "How did you do this?"

Jim continued to examine Will's arm before his eyes meet Joyce's. "This is maker. That's the real one," Jim said, watching as the nurses in the room shifted their focus.

"We match," Mike said. Slowly Will's eyes glanced up from the white sheet that had been covering him. All he could feel was fear. Would Mike hate him now? "It's a match." Mike said again, this time even softer.

"While we start doing blood work and cleaning this up, there should really only be two people here," Another nurse said, picking up on the drama that was slowly unfolding in the ER room. "Only his parents. You can see him when we get him set up in a room."

"Will, I," Mike started, dodging the nurse for a moment before she folded her arms and shook her head.

"Kid, you can see him when he gets a room. Right now we need to work on this," Jim said, motioning towards the door

"Okay," Mike finally said, finally turning and leaving the room.

For a moment Will felt like he could breathe again. That didn't last long though.

"William, you have so much explaining to do," Joyce said, still staring at the large sore on her son's chest.

It took almost an hour to get him situated in his own hospital room. The good news was that he'd probably only be there for a day or two. After the doctor came in and looked he assured everyone that it could be treated with antibiotics. The hard part had been telling his mom and Jim what he'd done.

He explained how he knew that Mike was his soulmate and that he'd been drawing on the soulmark for the last couple of months. Then he told them about how he'd tried to get rid of the mark by burning it off, which only left with him with an infection. Joyce continued to go off, telling Will about how dangerous it was.

"Will, you can't..." She trailed off, shaking her head. Jim was kind enough to place a hand on her shoulder before continuing for her.

"We're your parents Will, you should be able to come to us with everything. Trying to burn that mark off was stupid but I think ending up in the hospital is a pretty good lesson."

"I know," Will said softly, nodding his head in agreement. "After it got infected I didn't know what to do. I thought it would get better on it's own." Clearly it hadn't though.

"Why were you so afraid to tell Mike that you and him matched?" Hopper asked, taking a seat next to the bed while Joyce took the seat next to him. "We've known him forever and he doesn't seem like the kind of person to reject their soulmate."

"I don't know," Will said carefully, because they hadn't heard Mike talk in the last couple of months. That hadn't heard everything he'd had to say about soulmates. "I just...He really wanted to be with El and when they weren't a match I think it really bothered him. Then he started saying things about not wanting to a soulmate and I was scared he'd hate me."

"Will," Joyce said gently, pulling her chair up closer to the boy's bed. "I don't see how anyone could hate someone like you. What you did was certainly wasn't smart but you cared so much about that Mike you didn't want to lose him as a friend. I just don't think Mike is the kind of person to hate, despite what he might have said."

Will sunk lower down into the hospital bed and stayed silent for a few moments. "Is he still here?" He asked, wondering if maybe the other had went back home. He'd been trying to block everything out of his bond, too afraid to feel what Mike was feeling.

"Oh yeah, him and El are still in the waiting room. You're mom and I

are going to go grab some dinner in the cafeteria, we can send them up if you read," Hopper said.

"Yeah, okay," Will finally nodded, pulling the white scratchy blanket up further around himself. After the antibiotics he'd already started to feel a lot better. But there was still the fear of what Mike would say to him. Will knew he needed to get it over with though. It was almost a relief. No more lies, no more secrets. Even if Mike did hate him at least he wouldn't have pretend anymore.

"Alright, Hun. We'll be back up in a little bit. I have a feeling Jim is going to hate the food here so we might have to make a fast food run," Joyce said, rolling her eyes.

"If we do we'll bring you back a milkshake and fries. We'll smuggle it in through you mom's purse," the man laughed, gently ruffling Will's hair before the two of them left.

It felt like ages had passed. The television was on, the sun had set and the hospital window gave him the perfect view of the small town. Small lights flicked below. The room was dimly lit but ready a nurse had brought extra blankets for his mom. Will doubted Jim and El could stay too. Even though he wanted them there as well.

He kept taking deep breaths to calm himself. Ten minutes had passed and then fifteen, Will was afraid that Mike didn't want to see him. Just when he was about to give up a knock on the door startled him. Before he could answer though Mike was pushing it open and stepping inside the room.

"Hey, sorry I got lost. It's a pretty big hospital," Mike said sheepishly as he closed the door behind him. "El went to go get something to eat with your parents. It's just me...is that okay?" Mike asked, slowly take a seat by the bed. "If you don't feel up to talking I can go.

No, no it's fine," Will mumbled, staring down at the white tiled floor. "You can stay."

"Will I just..." Mike sighed before going on. "I know why you didn't tell me we matched. I'm sorry, I'm so so sorry that I said all those things and for all the emotions I sent you through. I didn't know,"

Mike mumbled, shaking his head. "You know I don't feel like that anymore, right? I'm not angry. El said you were so afraid I'd hate you and that I'd not want to be around you anymore."

"You made it pretty clear that you didn't want anything to do with your soulmate. You're my best friend, I didn't want to lose you," Will said looking up into Mike's warm brown eyes for the first time since he'd gotten to the hospital. "I was scared, I didn't know what to do."

"Will, nothing would make me not want to be around you. Soulmate or not. I shouldn't have said such awful stuff. If I had known you were my match I never would have talked like that. Will, I don't hate you at all. I'm a little shocked but I'm not upset about this," Mike said softly.

"You're not?" Will asked, his own eyes widening in confusion. "You're not mad that I ruined yours and El's relationship?"

"Oh my God, Will," Mike said, shaking his head before he reached out and grabbed Will's hand. His arm no longer had the fake soulmark he'd been making and while Mike wanted to reach out and put his hand over their shared mark instead. It was covered up with bandages and gauze though.

"You didn't ruin anything. El was always meant to be with Max and I was meant to be with you. I've been really childish. I was angry because I felt like the universe was trying to tell me what to do, I forgot though that of course the universe would give me the most perfectly matching person. I didn't have faith that I'd end up the one person I should be with."

"You really aren't mad? You're okay with being stuck with me?" Will asked, so hesitant and scared that it made Mike's chest ache. It was so hard for Will to believe that Mike could mean those things.

"I hurt you," Mike whispered sadly. "I could feel it in the bond. I could feel you hurting and all your confusion and sadness and..." Mike trailed, quickly wiping at his eyes. "I know how you felt these last few months and all I can think about was how I made the one person I never wanted to hurt miserable. If anyone should be mad, it's you."

For a moment Will didn't know how to react. He could feel Mike's sadness and for the first time regret. But he could feel love too love and happiness and affection and that was all Will had ever wanted from Mike.

"Mike," Will said, bringing their linked hands up to his face and pressing Mike's hand against his cheek. "Will you lay down with me?" He asked softly.

"In the bed?" Mike said in confusion. "Do you think there's room for me?"

"Of course, besides, I'll always have room for you, no matter what," Will answered back, carefully moving over for Mike to join him in the hospital bed.

Slowly Mike pulled his hand back so that he could slip his shoes off. He knew they might get told off from a nurse or even from Will's parents but the opportunity to hold Will was something Mike couldn't pass up. He carefully avoided Will's IV, mindful not to pull at the wire they had connected to his finger to watch his breathing. Slowly but surely Mike found himself right next to Will in the steril smelling bed. "This okay?"

"It's perfect," Will said with a small laugh. He cuddled up next to the other and sighed softly. Every lie he'd told and every length he'd went through to keep his secret all seemed so far away now. "Hey, what did you want to ask me? You know, before I passed out."

Mike was even more careful when he wrapped his arms around Will, bringing him even closer. There wasn't much room in the bed but Mike was content for the first time in months. "I was going to ask you out," he answered with his own laugh. "I'd still like to ask you out, I know maybe the timing is awful but...if you can forgive me I'd want nothing more than to start over. As soulmates this time. I'd like to do things right this time."

"I was never mad at you," Will mumbled, start to feel the exhaustion from the day's events. He rested his head against Mike's chest and sighed again. "Mike Wheeler, I'd very much like to go out with you. As soulmates."

“Soulmates,” Mike agreed, smiling warmly at the word. He could see Will start to get tired, his eyes looking heavy and his breathing getting deeper. “Will Byers, we match, and don’t you ever try to change that again. You’re my soulmate and I want it to stay that way.”

“Dustin is going to say he told you so,” Will said around a yawn before closing his eyes.

“Right now I think I’m perfectly fine with that. Because he was right and I’m really glad he was.” Will didn’t say anything, instead he snuggled further into Mike and let himself start to drift off. “Good night,” Mike whispered.

“Be here when I wake up?” Will asked, still not bothering to open his eyes.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Mike answered back.

That was how Joyce found the two nearly an hour later. Will’s had pressed his head under Mike’s chin and Mike was holding on tight to the smaller boy. She smiled to herself before pulling the blanket up around the two. Finally she settled into the chair next to bed and fell asleep next to them.